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Christ and Violence (Book Review)

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Christ and Violence, by Ronald J. Sider. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1979. 102 pages. Reviewed by John R. Visser, Instructor in Business Administration and Economics.

Because of the increasing discussions about military readiness and major spending increases for national defense, at least in the U.S., the book *Christ and Violence* is timely, to say the least. A book of fewer than 100 pages, it can be read in a few hours with no difficulty. The book is divided into four chapters, entitled "The Cross and Violence," "Christ and Power," "Peacemaking and Economics," and "Walking in the Resurrection in a Violent World," each of which is followed by five or six discussion questions. Because of this format the book might be conveniently studied by church, Bible study, or prayer groups.

The first chapter develops the theme that God has called his people to live out the vision of the *Jubilee* in a manner which is described as the way of "suffering servanthood." The author points to the resurrection as the final triumph over violence and develops the theme of suffering as "calling" based largely on the sermon on the mount and I Peter 2:20-21.

In the second section Sider announces his intention "to argue . . . that the use of economic and political power may be, indeed is, fully compatible with the way of the cross as outlined in chapter one." He attempts to distinguish between forms of coercion which "love and respect the other person as a free moral agent, responsible to the Creator" and those which do not. He points out the difference between being "subject to" authority and blind obedience to it, and further states that "not to take the offensive against the (principalities and) powers is to ignore the whole thrust of God's action in history."

In chapter three the author applies his theme to economic structures which he says can "destroy people by the millions." At the beginning of the chapter he looks at Biblical teachings with respect to institutional violence, while later on he focuses on how North

American Christians are necessarily implicated and what they can do about it. He particularly pushes for a distinctively Christian life style in which the church must recapture the early churches "powerful experience of community in Christ's Body." He adds that "It is a farce to ask Washington to legislate what the church refuses to live."

Chapter four is a summary of the previous three chapters coupled with a call for action. Sider dreams "of a time when thousands and thousands of congregations . . . have been transformed from comfortable clubs largely conformed to surrounding society's materialism into radical beachheads of the coming kingdom" and when churches will "find new ways to witness to the militaristic madness of modern society."

All in all, the book *Christ and Violence* is an interesting book, well worth the time it takes to read it. However, it often seems as though the author is trying to say too much too quickly, and because of this the reader is left with the impression that certain of the author's conclusions have been more thoroughly researched and supported than others. He briefly mentions subjects from nuclear energy to refusing to pay "war taxes" with little or no explanation. The author, however, does not pretend to present an in-depth study of all the subjects touched upon in the book, but rather only to address an important subject and raise penetrating questions with respect to a topic that should be of considerable interest to Christians everywhere during the 1980's. To that degree he has succeeded, and thus the reading of the book *Christ and Violence* might be a good starting place for Christians serious about confronting an issue which has for too long been sidestepped by the mainstream of the Christian community.

Triumphs of the Imagination: Literature in Christian Perspective, by Leland Ryken. Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1979. 260 pages. Reviewed by Randall VanderMey, Instructor in English.

Christian readers and writers of literature, including those of a Kuyperian stripe, will find plenty to applaud in these pages. Ryken, a professor of English at Wheaton College whose critical essays have often appeared in *Christianity Today*, rejects *pro forma* the humanist tendency to grant literary art the status of religion but focuses more heavily on the chronic underestimation of literature in the Christian church, school, and community.

Ryken's case for literature is no new set of proofs or insights but instead a reminder that the greatest Christian apologists for literature, many of them outstanding as both writers and critics, insist together that

literature has functions uniquely its own. It may teach, but that in isolation would be its paltriest accomplishment. Its highest claim is to be able to teach and delight in the same operation by a marriage between aesthetically pleasing form and imaginative vision of reality which is prophetic and not bound by the aims or methods of the scientific, philosophical, or theological disciplines. This, of course, is a view first and most sweetly enunciated by Sir Philip Sidney in his "Apology for Poetry" (c. 1580) and built upon by T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, and others in modern arguments for a Christian aesthetic. Speaking from the chorus, Ryken recognizes Sidney as the precedent-setter,